

On May 23, 2023, the international round table “Sino-Russian cooperation in the context of the war in Ukraine” was held at the Ukrainian platform for Contemporary China. The organizers: [A. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies NAS of Ukraine](#), [the National Institute of Strategic Studies](#), the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists and the [Publishing House “Helvetica”](#).

**4 key questions** were discussed:

1. Does China’s peace plan mark the end of its diplomatic ghosting of Ukraine?
2. Does the “no-limits friendship” reach its limits in Ukraine?
3. What economic leverage do the US and Europe have over Sino-Russian convergence?
4. What are the potential implications of Sino-Russian cooperation for the global security?

**The speakers:**

Dmytro Yefremov (Ukraine), Olena Bordilovska (Ukraine), Chelsea Ngoc Minh Nguyen (Indonesia), Jiong Gong (China), Graeme Robertson (USA), Jakub Jakóbowski (Poland).

The event was moderated by **Isabel Hilton**, founder of the <https://chinadialogue.net/> platform, who opened the event with a brief presentation of China’s position on the war in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion.

**Jakub Jakóbowski** emphasized the importance of such a professional discussion, especially considering the special mission of China’s special representative Li Hui to Ukraine, Poland, and other European countries these days. He expressed skepticism about the Chinese “peace plan” and China’s mediation in solving the Ukrainian issue due to the lack of experience of the PRC in such processes, as well as the asymmetry of Sino-Russian and Sino-Ukrainian relations in favor of Russia. Although, as the expert notes, Sino-Russian relations have certain limits. Jakub calls the Chinese peace mediation a game for strengthening its position in Europe and in the Global South, which would result in Beijing’s insisting on an immediate end to the war through negotiations.

**Dmytro Yefremov** reports that Chinese mediation should be considered in the context of Chinese culture, which is based on balance, peace and harmony, finding a compromise, especially with large countries. The different status of Ukraine and Russia in the architecture of international relations, from China’s point of view, presupposes the establishment of unfair terms of peace, shifted in favor of Russia.

**Jiong Gong** presented his perspective on the Chinese mediation mission, stressing that he is not a representative of the government. The professor noted that in the conditions of the protracted conflict, not only China is pushing for peace talks, but also a number of neutral countries in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, which represent the majority in terms of the world’s population. According to the expert, these countries will collectively contribute to peace mediation. China’s 12-point plan, or set of basic principles, still needs diplomatic efforts and consultations with the international community to produce results.

**Olena Bordilovska** noted that the reaction of the so-called Global South to the Chinese peace initiative is positive, which aims to reduce numerical risks, such as food and security crises. Most of the countries of the Global South want to be active players in the negotiation process regarding the establishment of peace in Ukraine, even competing for leadership in this. India plays a special role due to its rivalry with China and friendly relations with the USA, which neither supports the Ukrainian and Chinese plans nor offers its own solution to the conflict. The example of Pakistan, as an all-weather partner of the PRC and a traditionally neutral country in foreign policy, is also

unique, because the country considers the Chinese peace initiative the only way to resolve the Ukrainian crisis.

**Graeme Robertson** emphasized that China is a global player, while Russia is only a regional player. China is not able to be a big influencer in Europe the way it influences the countries of Africa and Latin America, which is China's great achievement. The war creates both challenges and new opportunities for China, including gains from a weakened Russia. China seeks to stabilize relations with Europe, which is seen as the main reason for its peace initiative.

**Chelsea Ngoc Minh Nguyen** shared her expert opinion that the moment China announced the "peace plan" can be considered a new stage 2.0 of China's global role. The expert noted that China's peace initiative should be considered not from the point of view of the Russian-Ukrainian war, but from the point of view of China's global ambitions. Ukraine is gradually becoming a global player, communicating on various international platforms even with the closest Russian allies, such as India and Vietnam, which is important, given that the views of the countries of the Global South on the war in Ukraine differ.

**Jiong Gong** noted that China does not supply weapons to Russia, so it denies the existence of an alliance with this country in any sense. Economic cooperation with Ukraine and Russia continues, as well as a large number of other countries of the world cooperate with both countries, such as Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, etc. "No-limits friendship", which was announced by China and Russia at the Winter Olympics before the invasion, the professor considers only as a diplomatic language, which China did not use again. Supporting Russia with weapons is a red line that China will never cross. China has primarily an economic interest in Ukraine and in Europe, which will prompt it to contribute to the end of the conflict, as well as be proactive in response to pressure from European leaders. The war in Ukraine affects not only the region but also the whole world, for example, by provoking a food crisis.

**Jakub Jakóbowski** believes that Sino-Russian relations are similar to an alliance, as this is confirmed by high-level meetings, as well as official rhetoric. The limits of friendship are set also under the pressure of the West.

**Dmytro Yefremov** noted that Russia does not perceive the Chinese 12-point document as a work plan in general. The expert also does not see sufficient signs of integration processes between the economies of China and Russia; their bilateral relations retain a contractual form, which he explains by the mutual distrust of the leadership of the two countries. Therefore, he does not see that China will be able to reach a consensus with Russia on the Ukrainian issue. At the same time, China is not interested in the fall of the Putin regime, because it does not want the Russian Federation to change to a pro-European vector.

**Chelsea Ngoc Minh Nguyen** added that Russia still has a positive image in Asia and is trying to find supporters, for example in countries such as India and Vietnam, which have territorial disputes with China. The expert also paid attention that official Kyiv adheres to the opinion that China has not yet supplied weapons to Russia and sees China's position as neutral.

**Graeme Robertson** notes that the relationship between Russia and China is driven by the current interests of the two countries, which together can pose a significant threat to the collective West. On the Russian side, they are driven by support needs and market access needs. Historically, the countries have had episodes of hostility towards each other, which should also be taken into account when analyzing the nature of their bilateral relations.

**Jiong Gong** does not call the growth of Sino-Russian economic cooperation as a convergence, but considers this process as a result of the commercial reduction of competition in the Russian market after the withdrawal of Western companies. The expert stressed that China will not give up trade relations with any country under pressure. He considers China's peacekeeping mission as the right initiative. The scientist said that NATO is a participant in the conflict, which carries a risk from the Chinese point of view.

**Chelsea Ngoc Minh Nguyen** added that the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations is explained by the deterioration of relations with Europe. With the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, security concerns in Asia increased, and the discussion of territorial disputes intensified.

**Olena Bordilovska** emphasized that the role of the countries of the Global South in the international system is growing, including global security. Ukraine did not pay enough attention to relations with the countries of the Global South. But now the situation is changing for the better, because Ukraine needs to be an active participant in international discussions, also with these countries. India sees China's mediating role as a challenge for itself and is jealous of the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations. India has no successful experience as a mediator and has not offered any proposals on the Ukrainian issue. According to the professor, India sees a threat to its security due to the Sino-Russian approaching.

**Jakub Jakóbowski** recalled that Ukraine's accession to NATO was not approved, so it could not serve as a real justification for the Russian invasion. According to the scientist, Sino-Russian relations will not affect the global architecture, but will increase the pressure on the strategic autonomy of Europe from the US and the displacement of the US from the Indo-Pacific region.

**Dmytro Yefremov** noted that the threat to international security is connected with China's development of an alternative to the Western "order based on rules". China positions its approach as an "order based on international law", which de facto provides the possibility of its own interpretation of legal norms by China and other large countries, as a result of which their relativization occurs. China's global security initiative will also have a similar relative character, while maintaining a framework and vagueness.